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BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6061 AUGUST 6, 1978
LENT/ROME 9:40P

PAUL PONTIFICATE

INTRO: AN HISTORIC EFFORT IN THE HISTORY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ENDED SUNDAY WITH THE DEATH AT EIGHTY OF POPE PAUL THE SIXTH. VOA'S ROME CORRESPONDENT REVIEWS SOME OF THE MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF PAUL'S PONTIFICATE.

TEXT: POPE PAUL INHERITED THE PAPACY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, INITIATED BY HIS PREDECESSOR--THE BELOVED POPE JOHN THE TWENTY-THIRD.

PAUL CARRIED VATICAN TWO TO ITS CONCLUDION IN NINETY-SIXTY-FIVE, AND THUS IS CREDITED WITH BRINGING ABOUT ONE OF THE MOST EXTENSIVE AND POSITIVE CHURCH REVOLUTIONS IN HISTORY.

IN EFFECT, VATICAN TWO HAS BROUGHT THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH INTO THE MODERN WORLD. THE MASS WAS SIMPLIFIED, AND MANDATORY USE OF LATIN WAS DROPPED.

THESE WERE BUT OUTWARD SYMBOLS OF A FUNDAMENTAL REVOLUTION IN THE CHURCH. FROM A RIGID SYSTEM UNDER WHICH PRIESTS ADMINISTERED RITES TO A LARGELY PASSIVE FLOCK OF THE FAITHFUL, VATICAN TWO BEGAN MORE DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF LAYMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

SWEEPING CHANGES ENGENDERED SWEEPING REACTIONS. CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS ACCUSTOMED TO A STRICT HIERARCHICAL APPROACH WERE SHOCKED BY PAUL'S REFORMING ZEAL.

FRENCH ARCHBISHOP MARCEL LEFEBVRE TYPIFIES THE TRADITIONALISTS. HIS CONTINUED ORDINATION OF PRIESTS ACCORDING TO THE OLD RITES IS CONDEMNED BY THE VATICAN AS ILLEGITIMATE AND TENDING TO PROMOTE SCHISM IN THE CHURCH.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE SCALE LIBERAL PRELATES CHAFE

HE DESCRIBED THE CHURCH AS TENACIOUSLY CONSERVATIVE AND WAS UNYIELDING IN HIS INSISTENCE ON PRIESTLY CELEBACY AND HIS OPPOSITION TO ARTIFICIAL BIRTH CONTROL AND ABORTION.

FOLLOWING THE REFORMING ZEAL OF THE EARLY YEARS OF HIS PONTIFICATE, PAUL CLEARLY FELT IN THE LATER YEARS THAT HE HAD GONE FAR ENOUGH. HE SPOKE OUT AGAINST ALL ASPECTS OF THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY--CONDEMNING PRE-MARTIAL SEX, ABORTION, DIVORCE, HOMOSEXUALITY AND PORNOGRAPHY.

IN DOING SO, POPE PAUL CAST HIMSELF IN THE ROLE OF THE SUPREME TEACHER, SETTING MORAL STANDARDS WHICH HE KNEW WERE NOT ALWAYS RESPECTED.

ON THIS BLEND OF MORAL COURAGE AND REALISM, POPE PAUL'S CLAIM TO GREATNESS MAY WELL REST. DURING HIS FIFTEEN YEAR PONTIFICATE, PAUL WENT A LONG WAY TOWARD DE-ITALIANIZING THE VATICAN HIERARCHY -- AND HE HAS ESTABLISHED A NEW STYLE OF PONTIFICATE BASED ON REGULAR CONSULTATION WITH HIS BISHOPS AROUND THE WORLD.

POPE PAUL WAS THE FIRST POPE TO TRAVEL ALL FIVE CONTINENTS.

NOW, POPE PAUL IS DEAD. THE FAITHFUL WILL MOURN AND THEN TURN ATTENTION TO THE SELECTION OF HIS SUCCESSOR AND THE LEADERSHIP THIS MAN WILL BRING TO THE WORLD'S SIX HUNDRED SIXTY MILLION ROMAN CATHOLICS.

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